

**HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2019
3:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Rob Sassi, Chairman
Kevindaryán Luján, James D. O'Donnell, Janet Sutherland, Laurie R. Tautel,
Peter V. Tuohy

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Katie Bonelli, Majority Leader
Michael D. Paduch, Minority Leader
Thomas D. Faggione, Legislator
Paul Ruskiewicz, Legislator
Kathy Stegenga, Legislator
John S. Vero, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Wayne Booth, Director, Operations and Cost Control
Darcie Miller, Commissioner of Social Services and Mental Health
Todd Craner, Fiscal Director, Department of Social Services
Irina Gelman M.D., Commissioner of Health
Michael Ventre, Deputy Commissioner of Health
Laurence LaDue, Commissioner, Valley View Center
Donna Strecker, Director of Finance, Valley View Center
Deborah Slesinski, Deputy Budget Director

Mr. Sassi opened the committee meeting at 3:32 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. All committee members were present with the exception of Legislators Amo and Anagnostakis who were absent.

On the agenda were the highlighted important issues from the Department of Social Services monthly report.

Mr. Sassi asked that Ms. Miller highlight Orange County's homeless situation after the monthly report.

Ms. Miller reported that per Stephen Knob, Director, Orange County Employment and Training the unemployment rate in Orange County was at 3.2% and Temporary Assistance, Family Assistance, Safety Net and SNAP numbers showing a decrease. The HEAP season is in full swing and they are rapidly receiving and processing applications. Due to the federal government's partial closure the federal government worked with the states to ensure that February's benefits were dispersed early. Clients were advised to budget their benefits throughout the month of February and at this time they are unsure as to what the March benefit will be; however, they are hopeful that the federal government will come to an agreement.

Mr. Tuohy asked for the 24/7 emergency number. Ms. Miller replied 845-343-7115 (HONOR) or 1-800-832-1200 (Help Line).

Mr. Luján asked about the 211 service. Ms. Miller replied that 211 used to be 24/7 but they stopped taking calls at either 5:00 p.m. or 7:00 p.m. and while the number is easier to remember those calls are still referred back to them.

Mr. Luján asked if someone needs housing immediately who should they call. Ms. Miller replied that they should call 845-343-7115 (HONOR) who answers all after hour calls for the homeless. The Department of Social Services has a responsibility to house "where found" homeless with very few exceptions on who they do not house based on New York State rules and regulations. The only time those exceptions can be overridden is when the temperature drops below 32 degrees and everyone is housed regardless of their sanction status, ability to contribute, and/or legal status.

Mr. Luján asked if they refer people from a different county back to their previous county. Ms. Miller replied no, they along with every other county have a responsibility to house "where found."

Mr. Luján asked if there would be a situation where that would not be the case. Ms. Miller replied yes, if an individual can stay with a family member that lives in another county they would have to go to that location unless there is a safety concern.

Ms. Miller added that in 2016, New York State began taking over a majority of medicaid cases with local Departments of Social Services managing chronic cases of medicaid. Their greatest challenge is long-term medicaid with applications over the last three years doubling. They have recently revamped their medicaid unit to have a specialized unit to process nursing home applications in order to keep up with the demand. Their Child Protective Services numbers have seen a slight decrease and Foster Care numbers have increased due to the opioid epidemic and in 2018, they collected nearly \$42 million in child support.

Mr. Sassi asked if they have any statistics on the number of grandparents raising their grandchildren. Ms. Miller replied that an accurate number could be difficult as some children could have been placed by the department of Social Services or the parent could have entrusted their child to their grandparents.

Ms. Tautel asked if they have seen a decrease in federal funding due to the government shutdown and has it impacted Orange County. Ms. Miller replied only with getting the federal benefit out early.

Ms. Tautel expressed concerns that federal employees could be contacting the Department of Social Services for HEAP benefits, SNAP and/or other services.

Ms. Miller replied that the Department of Social Services held an executive staff meeting last week with nothing being reported.

Ms. Tautel pointed out that she has seen an increase at local food pantries in her community and asked that Ms. Miller monitor it closely and keep them informed.

Ms. Stegenga asked if any of the eight children discharged from Foster Care were aged out. Ms. Miller replied that she was unsure of the particulars of this month's dispositions, but she could get the information to the committee. However, the children could have been returned to their parent/parents, been permanently placed either with kinship and/or freed for adoption and

adopted. Children do not age out until 21 years of age; however, at 18 they can sign themselves out, but they can also sign themselves back in if they choose.

Mr. Sassi shared that they spend a staggering \$10 million on the homeless in Orange County.

Ms. Miller explained that \$5 million is disbursed on sheltering those who receive benefits and are permanently housed and slightly more than \$5 million on the homeless. Most federal and state funds for the homeless are specific for housing the homeless through various programs at a very high cost even higher than the cost of hotel/motel. The cost for hotel/motel is approximately \$70.00 a night and/or \$25,000.00 a year; however, for supported housing or housing first options the cost is approximately \$12,000.00 a year to have someone permanently housed. A majority of the funds put toward the homeless are state and federal funds and leveraged with county funds the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance committed to addressing the homeless issues across the state. Regional meetings have been organized with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Office of Mental Health, Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse, People with Developmental Disabilities and the New York State Department of Health because a great deal of the funds coming through the Department of Health are for housing options and housing supplements. She has volunteered to be on that committee and to address placing new funding into the system and because she wears a dual hat, she has seen that by blending their funding together they would have more permanent housing options. They would like to pull out a portion of the money they contribute, contract with HONOR who does housing first with HUD funds and expand the housing first options and get people into permanent housing. In addition, they continue to advocate for permanent housing options that are housing first models and do not have checklists that eliminate those that we are housing temporarily due to a past eviction, felony or bankruptcy which precludes them from being a good tenant in the eyes of a landlord. They also continue to work closely with Continuum of Care and every county across New York State has been required by the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to construct a homeless plan and submit it by the end of February which she will have distributed to all Legislators.

Mr. Tuohy asked for a breakdown of the funding. Ms. Miller replied that if an individual or family has been on temporary assistance for over 60 months, the county would pay 70% of their cost. If a Safety Net individual comes in, the county pays 70% of their cost from day one with everyone else at 100% federal and state funding.

Mr. Luján expressed his gratitude that they would be focusing on permanent housing which could save millions in the long run.

Ms. Tautel asked about reform on applications for apartments and rent control being extended into Orange County. Ms. Miller replied that she would not provide a letter of support for housing options that are not housing first.

The meeting adjourned at 4:09 p.m.